

Obesity Epidemic

The World Health Organization declared obesity a world wide epidemic in 1998 and since then, the problem has become worse each year. It is now widely recognized by the medical community that obesity is an epidemic in nearly all developed countries. They have declared that obesity is replacing starvation as the leading health concern worldwide. The health effects of obesity now surpass those of smoking and it carries the same risk as aging two decades. A study conducted by the British Heart Foundation shows it's appallingly little. And the Foundation is using a shocking approach to change this situation. The Heart Foundation Study revealed that 40 % 8 - 14 year olds did not know that French fries were made from potatoes. One in 10 believed they were made from oil, eggs, flour or apples. And 33 % were unaware that cheese was made from milk. One survey carried out in New York City showing that children thought milk came from the corner store! We might conclude that one of the reasons populations are becoming more and more obese is a lack of education regarding nutrition and healthy eating habits.

In 2012-13, New Brunswick's health care system consumed 31 per cent (or 2.56 billion) of the total budget (8.266 billion) and obesity accounted for an increasing portion of that. If health care costs continue to rise, in less than 20 years it, along with education, will consume the entire budget. This means there will be no money left for anything else.

Now a report from Northwestern University in Chicago should bring everyone back to reality. Dr. Lijing and his colleagues followed the health of 17,000 men and women for 30 years. They discovered that those who were overweight in middle age and without any other health problems, had an increased risk of dying from diabetes and heart disease after age 65 over those who were normal weight in middle age.

Joe on the street is often confused as to why over-eating is such a problem and wonders why governments, schools, or even individuals seem unable to solve the problem. The health risks of being overweight are widely known and recognized, yet many people struggle with weight and over-eating. In this activity, you'll try to realize why it is such a complex problem and a difficult one to solve. Consider the following facts and, for each one, suggest why it is relevant to the discussion on obesity.

- a) Philip Morris (a huge cigarette company) regularly spends money on social causes (flood response, education programs, home building) but more money advertising those actions.
- b) North Americans drink 141 L of pop per person per year. That's 386 mL/day. A typical 355 mL can of pop contains about 10 teaspoons of sugar.
- c) In the US, children spend \$35 B/year directly and influence another \$200 B in household spending.
- d) Food is artificially cheap because of subsidies. On average, all commodities, except fuel, now bring farmers less than half what they did 30 years ago. The result is over-consumption because unhealthy food is cheap and "super-sizing" costs only pennies.
- e) A typical child sees 10,000 TV commercials per year, mostly for soft drinks, fast foods, sugared cereals, and snack foods.
- f) The Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program represents less than 0.5 % of USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) research and education funding.
- g) Of all pesticides found in food: 55% are in meat, 23% are in dairy, 4-6% are in fruits and vegetables, 1% are in grains.
- h) In 1886 Coca-Cola made \$50 and sold in 1891 for \$2000. In 2009, the company sold around 1.6 billion drinks per day with sales revenue over \$31 billion.
- i) The U.S. government nutrition education program was given \$3 million for advertising in 2003. In the same year, the food industry spent \$3 billion on advertising to children alone.

- j) After Santa Claus, the most recognized figure in the world is Ronald McDonald. The most recognized non-Chinese corporate logo in China is KFC.
- k) USDA Food Pyramid recommends meat, poultry, fish, and eggs make 14% of the diet yet 52% of USDA food-promotion resources go to these foods. The pyramid suggests that 33% of the diet be fruits and vegetables while these foods get only 5%.
- l) Serving size increases: small size fries was once the large size; a small soft drink was once 8 oz and is now 12 (or even 20); muffins were once baseball size and are now softball size
- m) “Upsizing” usually only applies to unhealthy foods. For instance, if you buy 6 oranges rather than 3, the cost per orange is usually the same.
- n) Research shows that people who are served more will eat more.